

MESSAGE FROM CATFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

When your Parish Council conducted a survey back in 2021 seeking views and suggestions from parishioners on what they'd like to see done to enhance and improve village facilities and amenities, three topics clearly topped the list by some considerable margin. They were the condition of the Village Hall, the absence of bus shelters and the steady decline of the village children's playground facilities.

Last year the Parish Council was able to take advantage of some grant funding opportunities on offer from the County Council as part of a government financed bus stop improvement programme. This has allowed for the provision of the recently installed bus shelter outside the Village Hall, the improvements to the surrounding pavement together with the provision of a drop-down kerb on the opposite side of the road to improve disabled user access. We were also able to link provision of the disabled parking bay to the same project which was largely funded by a grant facilitated by our County Councillor from his personal discretionary budget. All these works required only a small percentage contribution from Parish Council funds collected from the council tax precept. Further generous grant funding has been offered for a second bus shelter for the opposite side of the road planned to be installed on the original bus stop site, which is to be rebuilt by the County Council at no cost to the village. For those who may rightly be wondering why this site is being rebuilt so soon after it was moved and reconstructed opposite the Village Hall last year there is a simple answer. It has been confirmed by NCC that the contractors carried out this work in error so there will be no impact on parish funds.

You will have noticed the Village Hall now has a new roof, which was the first step in an ongoing programme of upgrades to the building. Work will soon begin on a new front door which will improve access, particularly for wheelchair users. Other works will follow as funds permit. All these improvements have been funded at no cost to the council taxpayers, by the Village Hall Management Committee, an independent body, from a combination of grants and many years of fundraising activities. This small committee deserve recognition for their efforts, together with one of our councillors who, with many years construction industry experience and contacts, was able to offer valuable guidance and help to ensure engagement with reliable and trusted contractors and value for money.

Lastly, the playground. The present installation has served us well for some thirty years but is unfortunately struggling to satisfy current safety

requirements or indeed look particularly attractive to those it is intended to serve. With the exception of the slide, it is planned to replace all the other equipment and enhance the area into a family orientated facility with modern apparatus and picnic tables. Sadly, projects such as these do not come cheap. So far, around 2/3 of the estimated total cost of £50,000 has been raised, including a maximum allowable £20,000 from the National Lottery. We have reached the point where all other grant funding opportunities have been explored and time is no longer on our side, since if work does not begin by Spring, it is likely the Lottery Fund will want their money back and the project would have to be cancelled.

The Parish Council has therefor decided to meet the shortfall by increasing the parish precept beyond the customary amount required to meet the rising costs of the services we have to provide, to raise the required funds. Although this exceptional increase in the precept for 2026/2027 will be £11,800 the formula by which council tax charged by N.N.D.C. is calculated means the increase in costs to the average household will be around a modest £3 per month. The Parish Council's intention is that this increase will be a 'one-off', meaning after next year, ongoing precept levels should return to customary levels. We know we cannot please everybody but hopefully most will understand and sympathise with our decision.